UN rights body orders probe into atrocities in Sudan town

GENEVA: The UN Human Rights Council ordered investigators on Friday to probe alleged atrocities in Sudan's El Fasher and to seek to identify perpetrators so they can be brought to justice.

The United Nations top rights body adopted a resolution ordering the UN's independent fact-finding mission on Sudan to urgently investigate violations in El Fasher. The text also called on the team to "identify, where possible" suspected perpetrators in a bid to ensure they are "held accountable".

The decision came at the end of a special session called to address the situation in El Fasher, amid mounting warnings of crimes against humanity and the risk of genocide.

"Bloodstains on the ground in El Fasher have been photographed from space," UN rights chief Volker Turk warned as he opened Friday's session.

"The stain on the record of the international community is less visible but no less damaging."

Since breaking out in April 2023, the war between Sudan's army and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has killed tens of thousands of people, displaced nearly 12 million more and triggered one of the world's worst humanitarian crises.

The violence has escalated dramatically in recent weeks, with the RSF seizing control of the key town of El Fasher in Sudan's western Darfur region after an 18-month siege and reports of atrocities multiplying.

Coordinated campaign against civilians

British ambassador Kumar Iyer, whose country requested the special session along with Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Norway, insisted that "the scale and severity of the crisis in Sudan can no longer be met with silence".

"The violence in El Fasher bears the hallmarks of a coordinated campaign against civilians by the Rapid Support Forces," he said, pointing to "credible reports of actively targeted killings, systematic, sexual violence, and the deliberate use of starvation". Before Friday's resolution was adopted, he urged countries to greenlight the text: "Without it, accountability will remain out of reach and the cycle of impunity will continue."—AFP

DISPLACED volunteers deliver a meal of beans to a family displaced by the fighting in Sudan's western Darfur region.—Reuters

Israel accused of banishing Palestinians to S. Africa

JOHANNESBURG: More than 150 Palestinians who have "mysteriously" arrived in South Africa appeared to have been "driven out" of the Gaza Strip, President Cyril Ramaphosa said on Friday.

After landing at O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg on Thursday, the 153 Palestinians were kept on the charter plane for 12 hours by South African border police as they did not have departure stamps from Israel on their passports.

The home affairs ministry finally allowed the passengers to disembark on Thursday evening after the Gift of the Givers charity guaranteed to provide them with accommodation.

"It does seem like they were being flushed out," Ramaphosa told journalists Friday.

"These are people from Gaza who somehow mysteriously were put on a plane that passed by Nairobi and came here," he said, adding that South Africa would investigate "the details", but had admitted the group "out of compassion".

A total of 130 entered the country and 23 took onward flights to other destinations, according to the ministry.

A first plane carrying 176 Palestinians had previously landed in Johannesburg on Oct 28, with some of the passengers then departing for other countries, according to the founder of the Gift of the Givers, Imtiaz Sooliman.—AFP

Agencies ignored warning signs before Sara's murder, review finds

The child's mother says her cries for help went unheard

Dawn Report

KARACHI: A damning child safeguarding review revealed a string of missed opportunities and failures by Surrey county council and other local agencies to protect 10-year-old Sara Sharif, the British girl brutally murdered by her father and stepmother in Aug 2023 after years of horrific abuse.

The independent review found that a number of agencies repeatedly overlooked clear warning signs, failed to question unexplained bruising and even visited the wrong address just a day before Sara was murdered.

Sara was found dead in a bunk bed at her home in Woking on Aug 9, 2023. Her father Urfan Sharif and stepmother Beinash Batool fled to Pakistan, leaving a note claiming he had "lost it".

Both were later jailed for life, while Sara's uncle Faisal Malik received a 16-year sentence for "allowing her death".

Systemic neglect

But the report, commissioned by the Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership, paints a disturbing picture of systemic neglect by multiple agencies, ranging from social workers and educators to health professionals, who despite years of contact, failed to grasp the scale of the danger Sara faced.

"The seriousness and significance of her father as a serial perpetrator of domestic abuse was overlooked, not acted on and underestimated by almost all professionals involved," the review stated.

Critical warnings ignored

The most shocking revelation came from events on Aug 7, two days before Sara's death, when staff from the home education team attempted a home visit but mistakenly went to the family's old address.

The error was noticed only after staff returned to the office, and the visit was rescheduled for September, which was too late.

"Sara's situation was not one where information has only come together with the benefit of hindsight," the review said. "A great deal of information, especially about the risks posed by her father, was available but opportunities were lost to join up all the dots."

The report concluded that services "did not identify that Sara was at risk of being abused" despite visible bruises and behavioural changes.

It said professionals lacked the courage to "think the unthinkable" — the child might be facing severe violence at home.

Lost childhood

Sara's early life was already marked by instability and state intervention and she was placed on a child protection plan at birth in 2013 amid domestic abuse concerns. She spent time in foster care and later in a refuge with her biological mother, Olga Domin.

Yet in 2019, a family court ruling returned her to her father's care. The decision was made without providing Domin with an interpreter, effectively silencing her warnings of danger.

In 2023, Sharif withdrew Sara from school under the pretext of home education, after which she "disappeared from view".

The report criticised the absence of legal safeguards around elective home education, noting there was "no requirement for formal discussion between parents and professionals" even when a child had previous safeguarding concerns.

Sara's teachers had noticed changes such as her sudden decision to wear a hijab at age eight and her increasing withdrawal. But accepted the family's explanations without further inquiry.

Experts later described the situation as "highly unusual" and said staff should have sought cultural and safeguarding advice.

Michelle Yeoh to get honorary award at Berlin film festival

BERLIN: Malaysian actress Michelle Yeoh will be honoured with a lifetime achievement award at next year's Berlinale film festival, organisers said on Friday.

Yeoh, 63, will receive the Honorary Golden Bear in recognition of her "outstanding achievements in film and cinema", the festival said in a statement.

"Michelle Yeoh is a visionary artist and performer whose work defies boundaries — whether geographic, linguistic, or cinematic," Berlinale director Tricia Tuttle said.

The award will be presented at the festival's opening ceremony in the German capital on February 12.

The Berlinale, running February 12-22, is Europe's first big cinema showcase of next year and ranks along with Cannes and Venice among the continent's top film festivals.

Yeoh was a member of the jury in 1999 and has appeared at the festival in *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* and more recently *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.

"Berlin has always held a special place in my heart," she said, crediting the event as "one of the first festivals to embrace my work with such warmth and generosity".

Yeoh won the best actress Oscar in 2023 for her portrayal of Chinese-American laundromat owner Evelyn Wang in *Everything Everywhere All at Once* — becoming the first Asian woman to win the award.

Her film credits stretch back to the 1980s, but her Hollywood breakthrough came when she was cast as the first ethnic Chinese Bond girl in 1997's *Tomorrow Never Dies* opposite Pierce Brosnan.

She also starred in the Oscar-winning 2000 martial arts film *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, the 2005 period drama *Memoirs of a Geisha*, and the 2018 romantic comedy *Crazy Rich Asians*.

Last year's Honorary Golden Bear went to Scottish actress Tilda Swinton, with previous recipients including Martin Scorsese and Steven Spielberg.—AFP

Singapore charges Australian man after Ariana Grande incident

SINGAPORE: Singapore authorities charged an Australian man on Friday for rushing film star Ariana Grande at the Asia premiere of *Wicked: For Good*.

Grande and other stars were attending the opening night of the film at Universal Studios in the city-state when the man, identified by court papers as Johnson Wen, 26, jumped a barricade and rushed the actor.

Video clips, which have gone viral, show the man wrapping his arm around a shocked Grande before he jumps up and down and waves to the crowd.

Grande's co-star Cynthia Erivo then rushes to her defence. The man is grabbed by security guards and dumped back over the barricade.

Wen was charged on Friday with "being a public nuisance", Singapore court documents posted online showed.

Wen represented himself and said he would plead guilty, added the documents.

He is to appear in court again on Monday.

If sentenced, Wen faces a $1,500 fine, three months in jail, or both.

Singapore's public prosecutions office could not immediately be reached for comment.

The movie launch went ahead on Thursday night, with the movie cast huddling around Grande before continuing down the yellow carpet.

Grande, 32, began her career as a teen on Broadway before embarking on a hugely successful pop career.—AFP

AJK politics heats up as PM Haq's successor named

Continued from Page 1

to AJK assembly's special secretary, Amjed Latif Abbasi in Muzaffarabad.

Assembly Secretary Chaudhry Basharat, who is related to Mr Haq, did not attend office on Friday.

Resolution

The resolution, signed by 23 lawmakers from the PPP as well as PML-N's AJK president Shah Ghulam Qadir and his predecessor Raja Farooq Haider, accused Mr Haq of having "lost the trust of the Legislative Assembly" and of causing "serious damage to the constitutional, ideological and democratic framework of the state through his governance style, political narrative and confrontational conduct".

"We, the proposers, recognise Faisal Mumtaz Rathore as the nominee for prime minister and call for the earliest completion of the electoral process in accordance with constitutional and democratic requirements, so that the continuity of government formation remains intact," it added.

Interestingly, the resolution — typed on a computer — had left the section naming the proposed new leader intentionally blank while signatures were being collected. Mr Rathore's name was later handwritten into the document before submission.

Another striking element was that 19 of the 25 signatories were members of Mr Haq's own cabinet, and none resigned even after filing the no-trust motion.

Who is Rathore?

Born on April 11, 1978, in Rawalpindi, Mr Rathore is the son of the late Raja Mumtaz Hussain Rathore, a former AJK prime minister who also served as senior minister, leader of the opposition and speaker of the Legislative Assembly at various stages of his political career.

His mother, Begum Farhat Rathore, who belonged to a migrant family from India-held Kashmir, also served as an MLA on a reserved seat, in addition to heading the PPP Women's Wing.

After the death of his father, his elder brother Masood Mumtaz Rathore was elected to the AJK Legislative Assembly in 1999 for the remainder of the term from their constituency in Haveli district.

Faisal Rathore first entered electoral politics in 2006 from LA-17 Haveli, Kahuta. However, he won his first assembly seat in the 2011 general elections on a PPP ticket and later served in the cabinet of then prime minister Chaudhry Abdul Majeed as minister for AJK Logging and Sawmills Corporation and minister for electricity.

In 2016, he was arrested in what was widely viewed as a politically motivated case but was subsequently exonerated. The young politician was appointed secretary general of the PPP AJK chapter on March 23, 2017, a position he continues to hold.

In the 2021 elections, he returned to the assembly and remained an active voice on the opposition benches. In 2023, he joined the coalition government led by Mr Haq as minister for Local Government and Rural Development and was also tasked with heading the government's negotiation committee with the Jammu Kashmir Joint Awami Action Committee.

Known for his soft-spoken, conciliatory and non-controversial disposition, Mr Rathore is seen as a figure who maintains working relationships across political and administrative circles. He has also worked in national media, hosting a regular programme on a private TV channel.

Military overhaul: jointness in name, centralisation in practice

Continued from Page 1

office, effective November 27, would formally end nearly five decades of joint-service representation in armed forces decision-making at least during war time.

The new command architecture has been projected by the government and the military as a functional necessity. Modern wars move at digital speed. Cyber, space, drones, and information operations don't respect the boundaries of traditional services. But Pakistan has lived for decades with an HDO that was regularly described by experts as "anachronistic" and "structurally hollow." In that sense, reform was overdue.

But how reform is done matters as much as why.

Rather than dispersing authority across a joint command or empowering a neutral coordinating chief much like what the United States did through Goldwater-Nichols Act or India with its Chief of Defence Staff, the restructuring has concentrated the logic of 'jointness' in the office of the army chief.

"Jointness is not being created between the services, its being created above them," a retired army general who extensively studied HDO said.

Former PAF Chief Air Chief Marshal Abbas Khattak, while talking to *Dawn* said, "Historical experience bears testimony to the efficacy of the independent status of the land, sea and air forces, which was achieved after much debate and analysis within the advanced western armed forces decades back."

"Are we then rejecting the globally accepted and practiced approach and regressing to the previous configuration without what should have resulted from a meaningful debate amongst our senior veterans and serving officers," he added.

The new system virtually makes almost every top armed forces' appointment contingent on the recommendation of the CDF-cum-COAS. It has been legislated that the newly created position of CNSC, an office overseeing nuclear forces, would be appointed, reappointed, and his service may be extended solely on the CDF's recommendation and the process would be shielded from judicial review.

This does not mean hierarchy behind the nuclear controls has drastically changed. The National Command Authority remains civilian-led and structurally intact, but it does tilt the institutional balance inside the military in favor of the Army even though the delivery systems are spread across the three services. The existing service strategic commands will be unified under new National Strategic Command.

"With new appointments of CDF and possibly Commander National Strategic Command becoming part of the NCA, both of whom would be from the Army, and CDF being senior to the other two services chiefs, it is not yet clear how the delicate balance between the three services, and between military and civilian components of the NCA would be maintained," worried Dr Adil Sultan, dean of Faculty of Aerospace and Strategic Studies at Air University, said. Dr Adil is former PAF officer and has also served in the Strategic Plans Division.

Section 8E(2) has drawn immediate attention for its sweeping exclusion of judicial review. It states that "the appointment, reappointment or extension of the CNSC… shall not be called into question before any court on any ground whatsoever." This unprecedented ouster clause looks to shield CNSC appointments and extensions from any legal challenge.

Legal experts warn that such language contradicts with Articles 4, 9, and 199 of the Constitution, which guarantee equality before law and judicial recourse.

Military law expert Col (retd) Inam-ur-Rahim noted: "It has been held by the apex court in a number of cases that any action of the military authorities, if taken without jurisdiction, coram non judice or in bad faith, can be challenged in the high courts as well as in the Supreme Court."

Although the amended legislations do not link the appointments and extension in services of Air Force and Navy chiefs to the recommendation of CDF, but observers say that the way the system has been designed, it looks that all four-star appointments would be done in consultation with CDF, whereas three star and below promotions and transfers would continue to be done by the respective services chiefs.

Pakistan Army Act

A subtle but significant change in Section 176C of Pakistan Army Act gives the CDF-cum-COAS decisive control over how his own powers are delegated. The amendment allows the federal government to authorize vice or deputy chiefs of army staff to exercise COAS functions, but that has been linked to the recommendation of the CDF-cum-COAS himself. Earlier it was the executive's prerogative to make such appointments, though they were rarely made by political government. Military rulers, Zia and Musharraf, appointed VCOAS to run the army, while they ruled the country.

A military source, speaking on the background, however, said the current chief does not intend to appoint a vice chief of army staff, for now.

Moreover, an amendment in Section 176A of Pakistan Army Act preserves constitutional primacy for the person with the rank of Field Marshal. It specifies that where inconsistencies arise, Article 243 of the Constitution, which governs command of the armed forces, will prevail.

Military law expert Omar Farooq Adam, while explaining the amendment said: "If there is any inconsistency between the provisions of Section 176A of the Army Act as to the service of Field Marshal then Article 243 of the constitution will be relied on mainly with regards to terms and conditions of service."

Section 176A of the Pakistan Army Act empowers the federal government to make regulations for the governance, command, discipline, recruitment, terms of service, rank, precedence, and administration of the Pakistan Army, as well as for any other purposes of the Act beyond those covered by rules under Section 176.

The government defends the reforms as "clarity, not concentration". They argue the position of Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee had long become ceremonial, that duplication needed to be eliminated, that global best practices demanded a single strategic integrator. And in fairness, much of that is true. CJCSC had neither the influence nor the required operational command. The services often behaved more like parallel bureaucracies than components of a joint war-fighting machine.

But modernisation means reducing the power of individual service chiefs and strengthening joint institutions that dilute single-service dominance. This model does the opposite by pulling more levers upward into a single office and lengthens its tenure to at least 2030 and potentially beyond to 2035. Therefore, instead of producing a system that could streamline decision-making the restructuring is risking becoming overly dependent on the personality, preferences, and politics of whoever occupies that seat.

The role of Navy and Air Force in decision making looks diminished precisely at the moment when their roles should be expanding due to maritime competition and emerging airspace threats.

ACM Khattak argues that "modern air forces cannot work well when treated as an ancillary and under some other entity or command". He further said: "The question before us is not about institutional pride, but whether Pakistan chooses to align with globally proven models or revert to older arrangements that other nations ultimately abandoned after hard experience."

This is not an argument against jointness. The country's armed forces need jointness desperately. It needs integrated command structures, a strong civilian led defence ministry, and clear oversight mechanisms that bring coherence to national security planning. It needs what all modern militaries need, which is institutions stronger than individuals.

"I share the general opinion that institutions and traditions are stronger than individuals and must take precedence," former army chief Gen Ashfaq Parvez Kayani had said at the time of his retirement.